

Regional Commissions



The people of Marjeyoun and Kfar Kila attend a workshop at the recently established vocational training centre, South Lebanon.

FOLLOWING 22 YEARS OF CONFLICT, MARJEYOUN AND KFAR KILA BENEFIT FROM NEW VOCATIONAL TRAINING CENTRES

Marjeyoun and Kfar Kila are one of the many South Lebanon towns that have suffered 22 years of military conflict and isolation, which has left the local community — characterized by a young population — saddled with dire social and economic woes.

The people of Marjeyoun and Kfar Kila have experienced numerous massive waves of displacement, and as a result, have suffered

much difficulty in adapting economically and socially to where they have migrated. The conflict has often left families suffering from cessation of income due to the loss of one or both parents, reflecting on nutrition, education, clothing, and social status. The conflict has also resulted in hundreds of wounded who have survived, but with a life-long handicap.

Access to professional rehabilitation for disabled persons is limited, restricting their chances of finding placement in suitable jobs. Furthermore, the occupation of a part of South Lebanon was accompanied by thousands of arrests on different occasions. After their liberation, these prisoners became job seekers who need to feel reintegrated and recognized in the society. Unfortunately, with limited competence, they suffer great economic burdens.

Recognizing that sustainability could only be achieved through a comprehensive and community based approach to development, ESCWA — following discussions with representatives of the community — established two vocational training centres in Kfar Kila and Marjeyoun. The centres function as administrative hubs that aim to provide youth career guidance; develop vocational skills; train youth in entrepreneurial skills to enable them to start their businesses, manage their accounts, deal with clients and market their products; and allocate seed funds for micro-credit financing to establish small enterprises. Opening new economic horizons in this manner would assist in discouraging rural migration — an issue high on ESCWA's agenda.

In welcoming the ESCWA team, Orthodox Archbishop for Marjeyoun Elias Khoury said "we see ESCWA on the ground, undertaking a serious effort to contribute to the development of South Lebanon," while the qaïmaqam of Marjeyoun Semann Atweh said that in such a short time ESCWA was "serious about their promise to help us develop our region."

This project was undertaken in partnership with Association d'Aide au Développement Rural (ADR), a local NGO with extensive experience in the South drawn from various development projects that have already been implemented in the area in partnership with international agencies. Recognizing the essential link between peacekeeping and development, ESCWA has also cooperated with the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). Building on the technical expertise of its troops, UNIFIL is expected to provide assistance in delivering courses.

UNITED NATIONS REGIONAL COMMISSIONS

The United Nations has five regional commissions which focus on programmes at the regional and local level. The following stories from the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia are illustrations of the type of community-based projects which the all of the Regional Commissions are involved with to promote economic and social development.

ESCWA: Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

IBRAHIM RECEIVES BASIC COMPUTER-TRAINING CERTIFICATE THANKS TO POST-CONFLICT DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS

When ESCWA initiated a basic-computer training course for teachers of the village of Kfar Kila, Ibrahim jumped at the chance to take part. Kfar Kila is a town in South Lebanon, which has suffered 22 years of conflict. Here dozens of families, forcibly displaced, still live in precarious conditions: poverty, illegal habitat, mediocre access to services, largely unsatisfactory sanitation conditions, unemployment, and shadowy activities. And Ibrahim is not the sort of young school teacher who waits for opportunity to knock twice.

In addition to Ibrahim, nineteen other teachers from five schools as well as a few representatives from the Municipality, attended basic computer training for teachers in Kfar Kila. ESCWA had set up a training laboratory for these teachers, and devised a programme that includes training on basic computer skills. The training was organised in collaboration with Kfar Kila Intermediate School, and the Indian Battalion of UNIFIL. Ibrahim learned to create, save, and print documents. He particularly liked the exercises on inserting clip-art images to a document.

For Ibrahim, working with a computer is a magical experience. "This was all new to me. The real challenge is how to use the computer in our school lessons." Ibrahim wanted to share what he learned with the other teachers and his students. This was possible with a computer donation from ESCWA, which has equipped five public schools in South Lebanon with a fully functioning computer laboratory, each consisting of five PCs. "Because of the computer, our students somehow feel that they can now get the same chance that children in urban cities have." The parents have high hopes too. Ibrahim knows they all rely on him. He finds it challenging to integrate the use of the computer in his lessons. "I have not totally discovered what other wonders the computer can do." Ibrahim is aware that there are still other magic spells to brew. He knows that with a computer many things can happen with just one click. But as in the making of a magic spell, the right ingredients have to be there. In the meantime, he is hopeful that the future of Kfar Kila children will be more promising.

The course, which lasted 20 days, is likely to be repeated due to great pressure from other teachers to participate.



Ibrahim receives his diploma after completing computer training, South Lebanon. Photographs: ESCWA.

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